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Contact: Carol Guthrie
(202) 224-4515

BAUCUS SEEKS WAY FORWARD ON HEALTH CARE REFORM

Hearing witnesses confirm CHIP should come first in 2007, offer ideas for next steps

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) today asked health care experts how Congress should move forward to achieve universal health coverage for Americans. At a Committee hearing today, witnesses told Baucus that Congress should make renewal and expansion of the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) an immediate priority, and then follow it with efforts for universal coverage. Baucus reiterated both his commitment to CHIP and his principles for broader reform, including controlling costs, emphasizing preventive health care, and sharing responsibility for costs. Experts said universal coverage could best be achieved by getting widespread agreement on the scope of problems in the health care system, and then building on the existing system to get coverage to everyone.

Congress must **“try and come to shared understanding of the dimensions of the problem,”** and **“commit to the fact that everyone will have to give a little and get a little,”** said Dr. James Mongan, who is President and Chief Executive Officer of Partners HealthCare in Boston, Mass. **“And as a general rule it’s easier to achieve that kind of consensus if you’re working with known elements of the existent system.”**

Witnesses said that current White House tax proposals for health care would likely be insufficient to help most Americans who need coverage. They advised that helping Americans deal first with catastrophic high-cost medical incidents, exploring individual insurance mandates would be good first steps, and some employer-based coverage should be maintained moving forward.

They also said that while it is vital to move forward on comprehensive health reform, reauthorization of the Children’s Health Insurance Program should be Congress’s first health priority this year, and CHIP should not be linked to other health tax proposals or delayed until broader reforms take place. Baucus has already named CHIP renewal and expansion the Committee’s number-one health care mission for this session of Congress. He and Health Subcommittee Chairman John D. Rockefeller (D-W.Va.) have urged Senate budget writers to commit to the \$50 to \$60 billion that will be necessary to keep coverage for all current CHIP recipients, and to find, enroll, and care for the six million additional American children who are eligible for public health programs but not enrolled.

“I want every American to have the health care that is their right, and there’s no more important place to start than with our kids,” said Baucus. **“Congress should build on the success of the children’s health insurance program first, and then we must get moving on broader reform that will get coverage to all.”**

